

### ONE PREMISE: MULTIPLE OPTIONS

We began with the premise for a story involving a meteor streaking toward earth, a conflicted scientist, his crumbling marriage, and a coworker who makes his life miserable.

Let's develop the story and make it about Dick, love interest Sally, bossy Jane, jealous Ted, and the meteor streaking toward earth.

#### OPTION ONE

We can dress up the **Literary** skeleton and explore the theme that relationships are vulnerable to unexpected blows. The impending meteor strike could be real or imagined, past or present. The tension it creates, or the mystery that surrounds it, tests the bonds of the people involved. Threatening situations can bring out the best or worst in people.

The central question becomes what life altering decision will Dick make and how will it affect his life? He can decide to walk away from his chosen career, stay or leave an unsatisfying relationship, or come to terms with the fact that you can't save everyone, especially from themselves.

#### OPTION TWO

We can take it on a **Road Trip**. Dick, Sally, Jane, and Ted travel to the crash site. What they find when they get there isn't the main concern, it is what they learn along the way.

Dick can gain an important insight about himself, clear up a misunderstanding from the past. He can find out Sally is having an affair with Ted and Jane has always been in love with him. External obstacles make the destination difficult to reach and interpersonal squabbles bring the conflict to a head, but the internal journey is the focus. The Road Trip could be a slow psychological dissection or a hilarious Comedy.

#### OPTION THREE

We can wrangle it into a **Western**. Dick is the Sheriff. Ted owns the ranch where the meteor landed. Jane is the saloon girl who secretly pines for Dick while fighting off unwelcome advances from Ted. Sally is the new widow in town that Dick falls for. The Indians see the meteor as a sign that the white man must leave town or their world will be destroyed. The overall story question becomes will they stay or will they go?

#### OPTION FOUR

We can warp it into a **Science Fiction** future where the meteor is being controlled by savage Carpathians. Dick is the ship's captain. Ted is his argumentative first officer. Jane is his communications director and is having an affair with Ted. Jane wants Ted to take the Captain's seat so she can become first officer. Sally is the security chief and half Carpathian. Dick is intent on finding a way to turn the meteor against the Carpathians while Sally lobbies for a peaceful resolution. After all, not all Carpathians are evil. Ted and Jane realize at the last minute that if Dick

fails, they all die along with promotion opportunities. Sally forges a peace treaty while Ted and Jane live to plot another day and Dick is once again the hero in the eyes of the federation.

### **OPTION FIVE**

If we select the Romance skeleton, the focus is on Dick meeting, possessing, or losing the object of his affection: Sally.

The meteor, Jane, and Ted present antagonistic and interpersonal obstacles to this goal.

There are different ways to dress up a romance.

1) You can add the **Contemporary Romance** jacket. This is defined by the time period. The obstacles to their love occur post World War II to modern day. It is often combined with or related to the term “women’s fiction.” Ted wants Sally, or Jane wants Sally. Jealousy and rivalry keep Dick from achieving his goal. The impending meteor strike adds an element of anxiety. At the final turning point, Dick saves the day and wins Sally’s heart forever. Or, Sally and/or Jane saves the day if you want to add a feminist touch.

2) If you add the **Historical Romance** mantle, it means that the obstacles to love occurred prior to World War II and may feature elements of mystery or “damsel in distress.” In this instance, Sally is directly threatened by Jane or Ted while the impending meteor strike provides atmosphere and heightens emotion. We learn a bit about the history of astronomy along the way, but not too much.

3) If you choose the **Romantic Suspense** trench coat, the meteor strike is a Thriller and Suspense subplot. The setting could be contemporary or historical. The couple’s relationship is tested by the race to save the planet. Will they live to love or will the meteor obliterate them? Ted is foiled. Jane is mollified. Dick and Sally live happily ever after.

4) If you select the **Paranormal Romance** cloak, one or all of your characters could be vampires, werewolves, ghosts, zombies, or witches. The focus is on the romance and the paranormal elements as they attempt to thwart the meteor strike. The different species may have different agendas. In the end, Dick and Sally wind up together, the normal world is saved, and they are happy about it. Except for perhaps Ted. Or Jane. Or Ted and Jane.

5) If you prefer the **Science Fiction Romance** jumpsuit, the setting becomes the future, perhaps on a remote lunar outpost. A rocket may circumvent the tragedy, taking out the antagonistic Ted along with the meteor, leaving Dick and Sally to love uninterrupted in their space capsule as Jane waves forlornly from the control room.

6) If you adopt the **Romantic Fantasy cape**, your story will feature dragons, wizards, or fairies working to repel the meteor heading for them, preferably with magic. Perhaps the near miss with the meteor was foretold in a prophecy naming Dick The Chosen One, which tests his relationship to Sally. Dick and Sally hold onto their love in the face of fantastic odds.

7) If you assume the **Time Travel** uniform, some - or all - of the cast must travel through time to solve the meteor strike problem. Perhaps Dick travels to the past, leaving poor Sally in the present.

Will their relationship survive the distance? If Dick changes something in the past, will Sally still be in the present anxiously awaiting his return? Or will he return to find her happily (or unhappily) paired with Ted? Perhaps Jane sees her chance with Dick now that Sally is out of the way. But in the end, Dick and Sally are reunited and it feels so good.

8) If you don't do the **Erotic Romance** sheet, you'll need to add steamy sex scenes in specific chapters. The impending meteor and Ted and Jane's interference fuel the fire. As long as they fog up the windows while fighting for their lives, you're good to go. In the end, the meteor misses and Dick and Sally wind up in bed, thankful to have dodged the celestial bullet. Ted and Jane may end up in bed together as well, even though they pretend to hate each other.

Whatever costume you choose, your romance should satisfy the reader by answering the question: "Will they or won't they?"

The answer should be, "Yes."

If your reader is titillated and satiated by the story's end, they will love you for it.

### **OPTION SIX**

What if you decide you don't want to write a **Romance**? What if you decide it plays better as a **Thriller**?

If we select the **Thriller and Suspense** skeleton, the overall story problem becomes the catastrophic danger that must be averted: the meteor.

Dick's rivalry with Ted, pressure from Jane, and relationship with Sally create interpersonal and antagonistic obstacles to solving the overall story problem of the meteor.

The meteor itself is not an effective antagonist. A member of the cast, perhaps Ted or Jane, serves as the person standing in the way of Dick's successful resolution.

1) If we choose the **Conspiracy Thriller**, Dick fears there is a powerful group behind the meteor strike. Dick navigates the maze of conflicting information until he ends the threat to his world. Meanwhile, Ted and Jane make this difficult while Sally either helps or hinders.

2) If we choose the **Crime Thriller**, there is an element of mystery that Dick must solve. There is a criminal at the heart of meteor threat that Dick must expose. One of the cast members is the bad guy/girl. The rest just make his life complicated as he attempts to figure out who.

3) If we choose the **Disaster Thriller**, the impending meteor strike is real enough and the clock is ticking until it either strikes, misses, or is somehow headed off. This story emphasizes the very real potential for this type of disaster and how humankind can go about preparing for it. Sally's neediness complicates Dick's efforts while either Ted or Jane interferes and almost costs them their lives.

4) If we choose the **Erotic Thriller**, Dick has done something to attract crazy Sally. Her efforts distract him from solving the impending meteor strike problem. Ted and Jane help or hinder.

5) If we choose the **Legal Thriller**, Dick is the investigator or attorney attempting to prove his case against the negligible (or psychotic) Ted or Jane who allowed horrible things to happen. Sally can have a counter theory that makes Dick doubt he is on the right track.

6) If we choose the **Medical Thriller**, Dick and the rest of the cast face horrible medical consequences from a meteor that struck, perhaps an outbreak of radiation sickness or a strange virus. Ted or Jane may have unleashed a bioweapon, using the meteor strike as a decoy. Perhaps Sally's crazy theory is proven after all.

7) If we choose the **Political Thriller**, Dick must save the country from corrupt government plotting or a threatened meteor strike by a rogue nation who has the capacity to change the trajectory of a meteor's orbit so that it strikes a specific target. Ted or Jane represents the rogue country. Sally begs Dick to let someone else save the world and run away with her.

8) If you choose the **Psychological Thriller**, then there is a cat and mouse battle between Dick and Ted or Jane. Dick isn't certain exactly who the enemy is, but if he can't identify them in time, the meteor strike will erase the possibility, along with the entire cast. Or Dick is forced to solve the mystery of the meteor strike location. Was it a space rock or something more nefarious?

8) If you choose the **Religious Thriller**, then Dick could be a priest or religious scholar. The plot involves a religious prophecy or the meteor is somehow tied to biblical history. Perhaps Dick finds the Arc of the Covenant actually contained a piece of meteor that bestowed supernatural power to those who hold it. Ted or Jane act as the antagonist intent on finding or keeping the power. Sally's love for Dick makes his choice difficult to make. Will he have to sacrifice himself for the greater good? Is he willing to put her aside for the sake of truth?

9) If you choose the **Supernatural Thriller**, then otherworldly elements are mixed in. The meteor strike could involve paranormal activity or superhuman power. Perhaps the meteor gave Dick superhuman strength or gave the antagonist the same. How does that change Dick's relationship with Jane or Sally? Someone, such as Ted, serves as the danger to one or all. Stopping him may require Dick to acquire superhuman strength of his own, or just keen intelligence to find Ted's weakness.

10) If you choose the **Techno Thriller**, then the meteor strike takes on the flavor of technology gone awry. Perhaps Ted has figured out a way to steer meteors or the defense shield has been tampered with so humankind is no longer protected from the meteor strikes. Dick must figure out a way to thwart Ted and save them all as Jane frets and Sally pines.

The important thing is to convince your audience there are crises that lead to bigger, scarier crises that threaten your cast. You can utilize twists and turns and choose any kind of ending you like: up, down, up-down. Make the reader worry about the outcome and they will be thrilled.

For more information on story skeletons and the different ways to dress them up, pick up a copy of *Story Building Blocks: The Four Layers of Conflict*.